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PROJECT SAFE CHILDHOOD

U.S. ATTORNEYS LAUNCH INITIATIVE TO PROTECT CHILDREN FROM ONLINE ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION

KANSAS CITY, MO (October 10, 2006) — U.S. Attorney Bradley J. Schlozman of the Western District of Missouri was joined by U.S. Attorney Catherine Hanaway of the Eastern District of Missouri to launch the new Project Safe Childhood initiative.

“Federal prosecutors in Missouri have long led the fight against child exploitation,” Hanaway said, “but the exponential increase in the amount and severity of child pornography on the Internet requires us to redouble prosecutions and investigations. Project Safe Childhood will maximize our resources to bring those who prey upon our children to justice.”

Project Safe Childhood is a nationwide Department of Justice initiative designed to protect children from online exploitation and abuse. In Missouri, federal prosecutors are forging a stronger partnership between law enforcement agencies and community organizations, including children’s advocates, victim service providers, educators, non-profits and social service agencies. A unique public outreach and awareness campaign will also deliver the message of Internet safety to parents and children.

“Project Safe Childhood is a more comprehensive approach to combating online child exploitation,” Schlozman explained. “This coalition will elevate our successful efforts to the next level. Federal prosecutors in Missouri have aggressively pursued child predators, and by involving community leaders and social service agencies to complement a stepped-up law enforcement strategy, we will have an even greater impact.”

Nationally and in Missouri, federal prosecutors have seen an alarming rise in child sexual exploitation cases involving the Internet. The United States Attorneys’ offices for the Western and Eastern District of Missouri have experienced a tripling of

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annual child sex offense cases between 2002 and 2005. Approximately one-fourth of these cases involved children being lured over the Internet or the actual production of child pornography.

Among the strategies of Missouri's Project Safe Childhood initiative:

- Increase the number of child exploitation cases prosecuted each year;
- Increase the number of investigators dedicated to child exploitation cases;
- Expand undercover enticement operations targeting predators attempting to meet children online;
- Increase the number of law enforcement agencies affiliated with the Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) task force to leverage federal, state and local resources to maximize the number of cases that can be investigated and prosecuted in an effort to take advantage of the new Adam Walsh Child Protection Act;
- Quickly investigate every lead from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children;
- Conduct extensive law enforcement training at multiple sites throughout the state to aid in the identification and successful prosecution of child pornography cases;
- Partner with children's advocates, educators and social service providers to educate parents and children to the dangers online;

And

- Launch a public outreach and awareness campaign. The goal of INOBTR ("I Know Better"), Missouri's Coalition to Delete Online Predators, is to teach every child to know better than to be the next victim of one of these predators.

"Missouri has a unique opportunity to raise public awareness of this problem and its solutions because of the commitment made by INOBTR," Hanaway said.

"Simply put," Schlozman added, "we are going to increase investigations, prosecutions and awareness in every arena. We will use all available resources to prosecute and punish severely anyone who uses the Internet to commit a child sex offense."

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